

Institute of International Relations

THESIS SUMMARY
to the Ph.D. dissertation by

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The Europe-pillar of the Hungarian foreign policy

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1 Definition of the research problem

The Hungarian foreign policy is a success story of the past 19-20 years, so of the period of the system change and it applies to the European policy as well. However, the accession of Hungary, the debates, the motives behind it do not make it so obvious that socialist and conservative politicians would have agreed upon the important question that determined the country's fate for decades.

The target of the dissertation is to prove that the Hungarian integration policy was a linear process, so in case a country decided to ask for admission to the European Union, it led automatically to the membership, the government had no impact on the process, could not accelerate or influence it in any way. It is also important to examine that in the European policy during the two governmental periods (Antall- and Horn-governments) the continuity¹ was not always that dominant than many would think, and this can be traced back to the ideological differences between the two political sides. This and other factors weakened the accuracy of the Hungarian opinion many times. In a country where everything and also its opposite are questionable, it is now a strange statement.

For Hungary the basic question was certainly not whether it has to join the European Communities or to remain out of it. For a small, open country – and this statement in economic terms is more obvious and less disputable – there was no other choice. The debate referred rather to what kind of conditions Hungary has to fulfil, how governments can influence these conditions and what kind of rights the membership should be accompanied by. With the membership Hungary became a part of the global political arena, therefore its responsibility became much greater than it was earlier.

My motivation to write this dissertation was first the person of József Antall whose ideas concerning the integration process had an impressing influence on the political class and introduced a new way of thinking in Hungary. Antall has not seen any other choice for the east-central European region either in the short or in the long run – neither in economic nor in moral aspects. He considered the membership as a compensation for those difficulties that Hungary had to bear in the past 60 years. According to the intention of the government a western oriented foreign policy was launched that - taking into account the possibilities - tried to maintain good political and economic relations with the Soviet Union as well.

¹ Similarity and continuity do not cover the same definition.

The other motivation was the neglect of this territory of science. Many articles have already dealt with this topic, mostly in economic terms, some books were also written, but a general work was not yet born. The cause might be that the European policy was not affected by sharp debates, therefore no one thought to be compelled to write such an extensive work. Concerning the neighbouring country- and Hungarian minorities abroad policy a dissertation has been already written.

Hungary joined the EU on 1st May 2004, so the common efforts were successful, but the process was not elaborated on analytical level. Books, articles, analysis are missing that examine this topic empirically. Despite the fact of the accession low priority was dedicated to the analysis of the European policy in the research work concerning the EU. Therefore there is quite few literature available so in most cases I had to rely on political interviews, newspaper articles, documents of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs during the drawing up of the dissertation. It is also to be underlined that the developments of the 1980s, 1990s, the deepening of the integration into the European Communities brought new problems to light. The creation of the single market then the Treaty on the European Union reshaped the organization significantly, so the relationship between the candidate countries and the EU changed as well.

Furthermore, I examine in the dissertation the relationship between Hungary and the EC and those agreements that were concluded during the period, because there is some contradiction in the assessment of these. It is also important to analyze the order between the foreign policy goals of the two governments. It can give an answer to some open questions. The analysis of the parts affects the totality and the analysis of the totality affects the parts, so it is relevant to examine this field.

Hence what motivated me to work on this topic is the demand to evaluate the period after 1994. It was interesting to see how the thinking of one political class has changed and how it tried to realize different goals with methods brought from the past.

2 Research methods

During the analysis of the topic of the dissertation I regarded the multidisciplinary approach as determinative, so I used the outcomes of the international law, the international economics and the theory of international relations. The research aims the analysis of the Hungarian European policy. I mean by it within this framework the Hungarian foreign political thinking concerning the European Communities/European Union and the political

steps that showed themselves in concrete actions. I do not intend to analyze the bilateral relationships with European (first of all western-European) countries. It is certainly important to mention in this correlation that international relations on community level are not unprecedented but to examine them would lead to far.

The timely scope of the research is limited to a period of eight years after the system change (1990-1998), with the necessary history to understand it, thus the introduction of the Europeanization process and the Hungary-EC relations. Because of the limits in size and content some important definitions, correlations will not be explained. In order not to go off the topic of the dissertation, some questions will only be slightly discussed or rather the empirical results of other authors are accepted. It specially applies to the neighbouring country- and Hungarian Minorities abroad policy because they are not part of the dissertation. The object of the examination is a fixed period of the Hungarian history with the aim of comparison.

Research questions:

- could the political class really not have any influence on the accession process
- how the Europe-image of the different elites was formed
- how internal and external factors influenced the political thinking of this era
- what kind of conclusions can be drawn generally and concretely

The methods used in the dissertation are the elaboration of the scientific literature, the presentation of the conclusions of different authors, the use and analysis of relevant documents, international treaties, legal actions, declarations as primary sources. I held it important to interview those actors who were directly or indirectly involved in the foreign policy decision making.

Key question of the elaboration of the foreign and European policy is the availability of the different sources. Only a little part of the documents of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs belongs to this circle. The detailed documentation of governmental activity is rather characteristic to the Antall-government (the so called Current Policy series). After 1994 this source is not available in that extension. With the help of these sources the analyzed era cannot be retraced completely. Therefore secondary sources played a great role as well during my work. Hence I relied on the findings and conclusions of the analyzing and evaluating press. The precise examination of the Parliament Almanac was of great importance and also the Hungarian Political Yearbook was very helpful for me too.

I strive to use both the evaluation and analytical approach in the dissertation and try to provide as many information as possible. The reason of the combined method is that a descriptive presentation of this topic was missing from the scientific literature.

2.1 The conceptual and structural layout of the dissertation

The first chapter of the dissertation is about the goals, the tools to achieve them, the object of the research and the presentation of the thesis. The chapter discusses the theoretical framework that is needed to elaborate the topic. Here I determine all the definitions that are inevitable in order to understand the whole dissertation (European policy, integration, Europeanization). Moreover I analyze the Hungarian foreign policy from a constructivist point of view and the conceptions regarding the integration process in the 1980's. Hungary is affected by many external influences which it has to take notice of. In small countries the foreign policy cannot be independent from these processes and unlike to great powers it can follow autonomous goals only in a tighter lane. Therefore a theoretical overview and a methodological introduction are needed and unavoidable. I discuss here the statements of the theory of international relations that try to explain the operation of the international order. How the Hungarian foreign policy has reacted to the changes in this system, how this movement changed the choice of the foreign policy at the end of the 1980's, how it affected its characteristics, how it helped its autonomy or made it reactive. In this chapter I present the change in the system of conditions of the foreign policy and I try to give a new explanation concerning the foreign political aspects of the transition process focusing on unique features of the Hungary-EC relations. I deal with the political party programs relating European policy, taking into account that since then every important party have already had the right to govern. In this respect it is quite interesting which political party thought Hungary to be a middle sized or a small European country because from this statement we can conclude to a reactive or proactive foreign policy strategy. The other side of it is the general opinion of the foreign countries, the reputation of parties in Western Europe. Which of the political parties did they think will be able to realise its program, among others the integration policy, who did they trust, what was the attitude of the EC to the Hungarian parties, namely who did they look at as a cooperative partner and who did they think can put the integration process in danger.

It is worth to review briefly the historical dimensions of the relations before the transition process, too. Namely, there was no institutional relation between Hungary and the European Community until 1988. The EC did not exist for the post-socialist countries. Of course, not in

an economic way of understanding, because CMEA (*Council for Mutual Economic Assistance*) countries had economic relations with Western countries to a certain extent, but there were no diplomatic relations either between Brussels and Moscow or between the single countries and the EC. In the second part of the 1980s the strategic changes in Hungary allowed the creation of the first relation in September 1988 which conducted to the birth of the PHARE programme after the 'annus mirabilis'. Its significance was invaluable for Hungary and also meant an intense trust by the EC. In this chapter I deal with the foreign policy of the transition and also with the Hungarian-EC relationship.

In the second and third chapter I analyse the conceptions that were used by the first two governments of the transition to start the integration preparations with, the programmes they elaborated and the coherence in pursuing them. The readiness to the reception of the Hungarian demands by the Community then is also not marginal from this point of view. The given political situation, including the relation between government and opposition, the functioning of the administration, the governmental structure had all leading influence on the role a country could play in the integration process.

The programme of the Antall-government in the frames of the whole government programme emphasized the elaboration of the part dealing with foreign policy. (Although everyone knew that József Antall propagated a shift of orientation instead of the change of the regime, he admitted in some way the process of opening the foreign policy which was started in the last years of the communist regime.) The shift of orientation propagated by Antall obviously indicated that Hungary would emphasize the development towards the Western, mainly the West-European relations instead of the former soviet-dominated ones. The programme of the government tended basically to the West-European integration from its economical side, even greater part of the documentation was given to it. However, the foreign political base was mainly driven by ideological conceptions. It was a common argument that foreign policy had not passed the foreign political ideas of the last government before the transition. The accusation could sound right because the previous (communist) regime had already started the process of opening towards the West and tended to be accepted by the West.

The government programme titled „the programme of the national reform” clearly put into shape the commitment to the integration of the Antall-government. However, it emphasized the priority of the nation contrary to internationalism. “The Republic of Hungary is following an independent foreign policy based on the priority of national interests, with the aim of completely restoring our national sovereignty. We wish to express and achieve our

national interests in accordance with the European interests and values and international realities.² In the frames of the change of the regime, and on new basis, we intend to establish and sustain a balanced international relationship system taking into consideration the new requirements and possibilities arising from the changed international situation.” This quote can be considered exemplary also to the period between 1990 and 1994, as it defined vigorously the ranking among the ideas of the foreign policy and laid down the stressed points up front.

Henceforth, I analyse the integration policy of the Horn-government: present the ideology of the government and of the parties standing behind it, the tasks derived from the government’s programme, their implementation, the relation of the governmental conceptions among each other, and the international situation which defined the external acting frames of the Hungarian foreign policy. The well-expressed aim of the Horn-government was (similarly to Antall-government) to continue the Euro-Atlantic integration and to prepare for the accession negotiations. I enter into details concerning the international judgement of the government, the expectations put up for a post-communist political power in the western political world. These questions involuntarily suggest the possibility of a new analytical aspect, namely: for whom Hungary is creating its foreign policy. Hungary represents its own interests being also concerned about the neighbouring countries’ sensitivity or follows a foreign diplomatic activity thus it shows the smallest level of activity without the intention of enforcing its interests. I analyse the correspondence between neighbour-policy and European integration in the case of both governments.

In the frames of the dissertation it is inevitable to analyse the steps of actors especially on European level which Hungary has little impact on, due to the fact that the changes and the shift of paradigm (László Kiss J.) in the international politics and in the international system Europe and the European Community had to create and rearticulate its place, role, and scope for action and last but not least its foreign political concept. It became the European Community’s basic role to contribute with the help of its own means to the liquidation of the divided continent. Although, it is known from the history of the integration process in the 1990s that the organization gradually stepped back from its own promises which were given to the East-Central-European countries and put the aspirant countries into doubts. Of course in such circumstances even Hungary had difficulties with elaborating its foreign policy: the country did not know what to react to. Because of this it is reasonable to look at the place and

² („The programme of the national reform”, The first three years of the republic, Budapest, September 1990, p. 177.)

role of the historical mission of the European integration together with the European development and also in the light of the last decades of the Hungarian development.

3 Research findings

In 1990, Hungary totally changed its political and economic system, with the change of the regime such foreign political changes were launched which had been hard to imagine before. Hungary's dependence system was transformed, the process of approaching of those West-European organizations which were seen as the pledge of Hungary's development started. The scope for action of the foreign policy had been changed, and the biggest stress in it was given to the European policy.

The dissertation is based on several hypotheses. One of them is that the intention of accession to the West-European systems of alliance, to the European Community in first place was not a question of the Hungarian government from the very first moment of the decision and from its approval by the EU, but it was a predefined road-map which could not be practically affected by the aspirants. The second assumption was that in the *policy concerning Europe* of the two following governments, continuity did not dominate in every case. The third hypothesis said that there were such differences in the image created about Europe which basically determined the appearance towards Europe and had significant effects on the 'Europeanization' of the foreign policy.

3.1 Conclusions

The second above mentioned assumption can only partly be proved, hence a lot of brief *declarations* of politicians had to be analysed which can help to evolve the essential differences between the two governments. From the policy of the governments several conclusions can be drawn concerning the European policy.

One of the implications is that there was no difference between the governments concerning the goal of the European policy. Nevertheless, there was significant difference concerning the principles of the European policy as an instrument that can be used in the interest of the other two foreign policy objectives. There was an additional difference regarding the Europe-image, namely the identity. From this point of view, two confronting identities can be distinguished from the documents of the era. One of them is a conservative steam belonging to the western direction in its principles and practice and spending the first four years after the transition under government authorisation. The other is the socialist

political elite which always approached the western organizations from a material point of view. Actually, it embodied not a community of values but the by them so ambitioned anchor of modernization.

The analysis of the 1980s and 1990s deserves an accentuated attention because it was in this period that the triple system of goals was set in the foreign policy, its bases were laid down in these years, and these were accepted later by the following governments without exception. The first governmental period brought along the shaping up of the frames, while the second four years were spent with the redefinition of the balance among the objectives and filling them with content while still keeping the frames. After the change of the regime Europe became the most essential direction in geopolitical and economic sense for the Hungarian foreign policy. This is a significant change compared to the former foreign policy practice, and the role of the pragmatists of the communist elite has also to be mentioned besides the politicians of the transformation.

During the research it also turned out that the foreign policy programmes of the opposition groups formed in the 1980s, and also of the parties evolved from them did not contain significant differences. The writers of the programmes were interested in finding straight answers to the most vital problems of the country. Therefore the programmes brought the necessity of the economic turn into the foreground, so they all made their propositions to the establishment of closer relations with the western organisations of integration. Neutrality as possible (or impossible) option was common talk only for a short term.

3.1.1 The process of transformation and its role

The transformation period which in every possible way reshaped the ruling circumstances in Hungary, has been interpreted in many ways. Some people lay emphasis on the internal causes and highlight the role of the opposition. The ones who took part in this process share of course the above opinion though they never denied the important role of the international factors in the transition. On the other hand there are some who think external factors had greater influence on the transition process of Eastern and Central European countries, and that internal factors were rather consequences than accompanying factors. To make justice between these two points of view is not simple - one might wait for an objective statement. One can state for sure though that either without internal or external factors the political change could not have been achieved. The Hungarian transformation became a part of an unforeseeable and unprecedented international historical change and in this respect all the

above theories are of the same opinion.

3.1.2 The Europeanization of foreign policy

There was a huge difference regarding the motivations of the Europeanization process. The approach of conservatives and liberals could always be traced back on the idea of sovereignty. Consequently they considered the European Community not just as an economical but a spiritual entity as well. The socialists highlighted the EC's financial capability by which financial support of countries that lack sufficient capital could be possible. It was perceivable from the beginning that the growth of state debt was the major factor that led the Hungarian foreign policy towards the West in the 1980's. And it was not by chance that the foreign policy of socialists/social democrats was based in first place on financial issues.

In the 1990's a considerably long debate evolved about the heritage of Hungarian foreign policy. I definitely share the opinion that we cannot talk about sovereignty of Hungarian foreign policy before 1990 at all. This could not be offset by some autonomous decisions as these were made in favour of ensuring Hungary's solvency (i.e. joining IMF) and could not be considered as sovereign efforts of Hungary's foreign policy. The state can be admitted that such autonomous steps would not have been taken if Hungary had not floated to the edge of bankruptcy.

3.1.3 The Antall and Horn governments

At the time of transformation the country faced enormous challenges. Some of these (among them foreign policy) were successfully tackled by the first government. The government programme laid great emphasis on the elaboration of foreign policy principles. The Antall-government announced more like an orientation change rather than a total transformation thus in some respect it accepted some of the efforts of the previous communist government. At the same time it also aimed to radically break up with the routine which could be regarded as constant conformation towards other countries. The orientation change obviously showed that Hungary intends to lay emphasis on developing Western, first of all Western-European relations.

The motivations of the Horn-government totally differed from that of the conservative government. After occupying office the Horn-government changed the balance between the

three foreign policy objectives and emphasized – at the expense of nationality policy – neighbourhood policy and integration. One could realize that this change did not only mean a shift between the three objectives but it meant a significant conceptional change against the former government's foreign policy principals. While the conservative government handled all three objectives autonomously, the Horn-government derived the success of one priority from another thus it interpreted the neighbourhood policy as a means towards a successful integration policy, connecting both very strongly to each other.

Several analysts, who though acknowledge the commitment of the Antall-government towards democracy, see some unevenness when judging that era's achievements. Among them Pál Dunay who criticized in more articles³ the governmental steps regarding neighbouring country- and Hungarian minorities abroad policy. Undoubted fact is that the coming into the foreground of the nationality policy could be considered a new phenomenon in Hungary - this goal was not plead by former foreign policies at all. Novelty was again the change of the point of reference which previously was the Soviet Union and afterwards was replaced by Europe. For this reason some of the criticism is not well established.

There is a foreign policy that pursues European standards and set new goals, thus neglecting this Europeanization process might lead us to wrong conclusions. It was impossible to look at foreign policy from the same point of view as previously when autonomous goals could not be set by the country. From this wrong starting point several critics have arisen regarding the EU accession agreement of Hungary which despite of all its imperfections meant an important improvement in the Hungarian-EC relationship.

The EU accession agreement was the first major step on the side of the EU towards Eastern and Central European countries giving them the hope of being equally treated which was part of the Europeanization process. The agreement was more important for institutionalizing the relationship between the EC and Hungary than for its economical references. The EU accession agreement and the application request to the EC were the Antall-government's most important achievements in the Europe-policy. The agreement was several times criticized by the Horn-government, initiating also its amendment but finally it did not come that far. As further achievement can be regarded, that the Antall-government was able to obtain some elementary, but specific conditions from the Community. This did

³ Vö.: Dunay Pál: *Kis külpolitikai mitológia - avagy a prioritás főnévnek nincs ugyan többes száma, de a magyar külpolitikának vannak fő cselekvési irányai*, in: Zsinka László (szerk.): *Külpolitika és modernizáció*, Budapest, 1996, BIGIS - Pew Alapítvány, 19-41.o.

not happen during of the former enlargements.

The Horn-government achieved more notable results in its EU relationship. Firstly it managed to permanently hold the enlargement on the agenda, reminding the representatives of the Community of this important issue. The second one is Agenda 2000 and the competition of the accompanying survey, finally the submission of the accession request in 1998. With the submission of the accession request an era was closed which could be called as the first phase of the passive Europe-policy. This phase started in 1990, from the establishment of the first government. The second phase from 1998 is out of the scope of this dissertation.

Both governments had to face the question of enlargement vs. deepening of the EU and both of them tried to give nearly the same answers. When in 1990 more possibilities arise to accelerate the accession procedure as alternatives to the EU accession, the government strictly supported the one alternative. Joining EFTA did not get enough support from the government, nor did the participation in the Community's second and third pillar. A free trade agreement with the USA and the establishment of an Eastern and Central European integration seemed also totally unreal. The one and only acceptable priority was the Western integration. Any suggestions that could lead the debate in a wrong direction were considered by both **governments as a detour.**

The major actors of the Hungarian foreign policy draw up their picture about Europe from a totally different point of view. Conservatives considered the European and North-Atlantic integration as a part of a 1000 year tradition, socialists contrarily as a modernization force. The "Europe picture" of the socialists suggested that the role of the Community in Hungary has only financial aspects and the most important task is to adopt all the prerequisites of the EC in order to be able to obtain financial recourses. The conservatives regarded the integration process as a two-way interaction where both players had to adjust themselves to the other. The major challenge of the Hungarian Europe-policy can be discovered in the different approach of the political opponents.

Hungary has come a long way from KGST to participating in European integration. Meanwhile, the conceptions, goals and problems to be solved with regard to foreign policy changed a lot as well. Among the three foreign policy objectives the most significant influence on the European policy by an independent body had definitely the EU itself, its messages have shaped remarkable our integration strategy but under both governments one intention remained clear: a full membership in the EU.

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